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Tuanku Abdul Halim reigns over two different eras

ALOR SETAR: Her face radiated with joy as she talked about Kedah's monarch Tuanku Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah ibni Al-Marhum Sultan Badlishah.

Tunku Puteri Intan Safinaz was clearly happy that her father would be returning to Istana Anak Bukit, here five years after serving as the Yang di-Pertuan Agong.

Her father's commitments in caring for the welfare of his state and the rakyat saw him traveling to all corners of the world on official capacity, and she would be there accompanying him.

In a recent exclusive interview at Istana Kuala Chegar, Anak Bukit, here Tunku Puteri Intan Safinaz shared with Bernama what her father has endured as the Head of State throughout two different eras of leadership.

Tunku Puteri Intan Safinaz, 50, felt her father was privileged to witness two very different economic eras after Merdeka, under the administration of two prime ministers.

When Tuanku Abdul Halim first became the fifth Yang di-Pertuan Agong, the prime minister at the time was Tun Abdul Razak Hussain.

The second time he was elected as the head of state, coincidentally it was the late Tun Razak's son, Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak who held office as prime minister.

"Having represented two economic eras, Tuanku was able to see the transformation that took place within the country's administration," she said.

One of her fondest memories when accompanying her father on his travels was taking the train from one state to another.

"When Tuanku first became the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, the modes of transportation available at the time was rather limited. It took some time to get from one place to another. Travelling by air meant boarding a military aircraft," she recalled.

Today, she said, the country's economic transformation helped bring about sophisticated rail systems, latest aircraft, internet access and numerous

public and private universities.

"By the second time my father became the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, Kuala Lumpur had already transformed into a metropolitan city. It used to be that the Parliament building was the tallest in the country. Today we have skyscrapers.

"The economy and people's lives have improved, the issues have evolved, with major ones resolved, and the country is now a developing nation," she said.

She felt it is fortunate for her family to have been in residence of two palaces, the Istana Negara at Jalan Istana Kuala Lumpur and the newer one located at a road named after her father, Jalan Tuanku Abdul Halim.

Tunku Puteri Intan Safinaz said that her father was very involved in state affairs as he took cue from her grandfather, the late Sultan Badlishah ibni Almarhum Sultan Hamid Halim Shah.

"From a young age, I have witnessed my father going into the office everyday where he would spend his time on state affairs," she said.

His majesty's close involvement was due to his experience in state administration, she said, as her father once used to work at the Land and Minerals Office and the District Office before being appointed as the 27th Sultan of Kedah in 14 July, 1994.

She told Bernama that Kedah was a state with the earliest documented form of administration in Malaysia, dating back to the 17th century. Thus, it was only natural for the Kedah sultan to contribute towards the state's administration.

"The solid and efficient administration of Kedah from 1882-1943 under the then Sultan of Kedah, the late Sultan Abdul Hamid Shah stands testament of this," she said.

Having followed her father on official visits often since young, Tunku Puteri Intan Safinaz noted that her father subscribed to a strong work ethic.

She remembered how happy her father looked when he graced the student award ceremonies at the state's best

schools.

"Tuanku has actively participated in ceremonial duties, community events, military activities as well as educational ones in universities," said Tunku Puteri Intan Safinaz, who is now the Chancellor of Universiti Utara Malaysia.

She said that Tuanku Sultan's commitment as the Head of State and Sultan of Kedah did not prevent him from engaging in sports and recreational activities.

The Tunku Panglima Besar of Kedah said that her father loved golf, tennis and billiard in his younger days. His majesty also followed the development of the national football teams as well as the state team.

"When he was younger, Tuanku would be playing golf from 5pm to 7pm every day.

"He also had a mini zoo with animals like birds, deer and horses, which he loved and took great care of," she shared.

Tunku Puteri Intan Safinaz revealed that her father also loved photography and kept a collection of a variety of cameras before the era of digital photography.

"Tuanku also has a dark room to process his films," she said.

While Tuanku Abdul Halim was away serving as the Agong, the Kedah State Regency Council comprising his younger brother Tan Sri Tunku Sallehuddin Sultan Badlishah, Tan Sri Tunku Abdul Hamid Thani Sultan Badlishah, and Tunku Puteri Intan Safinaz represented him in state affairs.

Tunku Puteri Intan Safinaz described her appointment into the council as an honour that she deeply cherished.

However, the responsibilities that came with it were not exactly simple.

"The Council had the opportunity to experience all the challenges and responsibilities that Tuanku would have undergone in the past five years," she said.

She expressed her gratitude for the love and trust her father had placed on her as well as the Regency Council throughout his reign as the Yang di-Pertuan Agong. Bernama

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Safinaz during the interview.